

Ardashir's Eastern Campaign and the Numismatic Evidence

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ARDASHIR'S COINAGE CAN BE EASILY DIVIDED into three major phases according to its images and legends (Alram & Gyselen 2003).

PHASE 1 is represented by a single type of coin minted in series (drachm, half-drachm, 1/6-drachm), which presented Ardashir as the new king of Fars (Fig. 1). The types and denominations are clearly rooted in Persian royal coinage, and there is a seamless transition from the previous coinage group of Ardashir's brother Shapur. From a numismatic point of view, Ardashir's reign as king of Fars probably did not last very long. The mint may be assumed to be Stakhr (Group/Mint A), which served for centuries as the main mint of the kings of Fars.

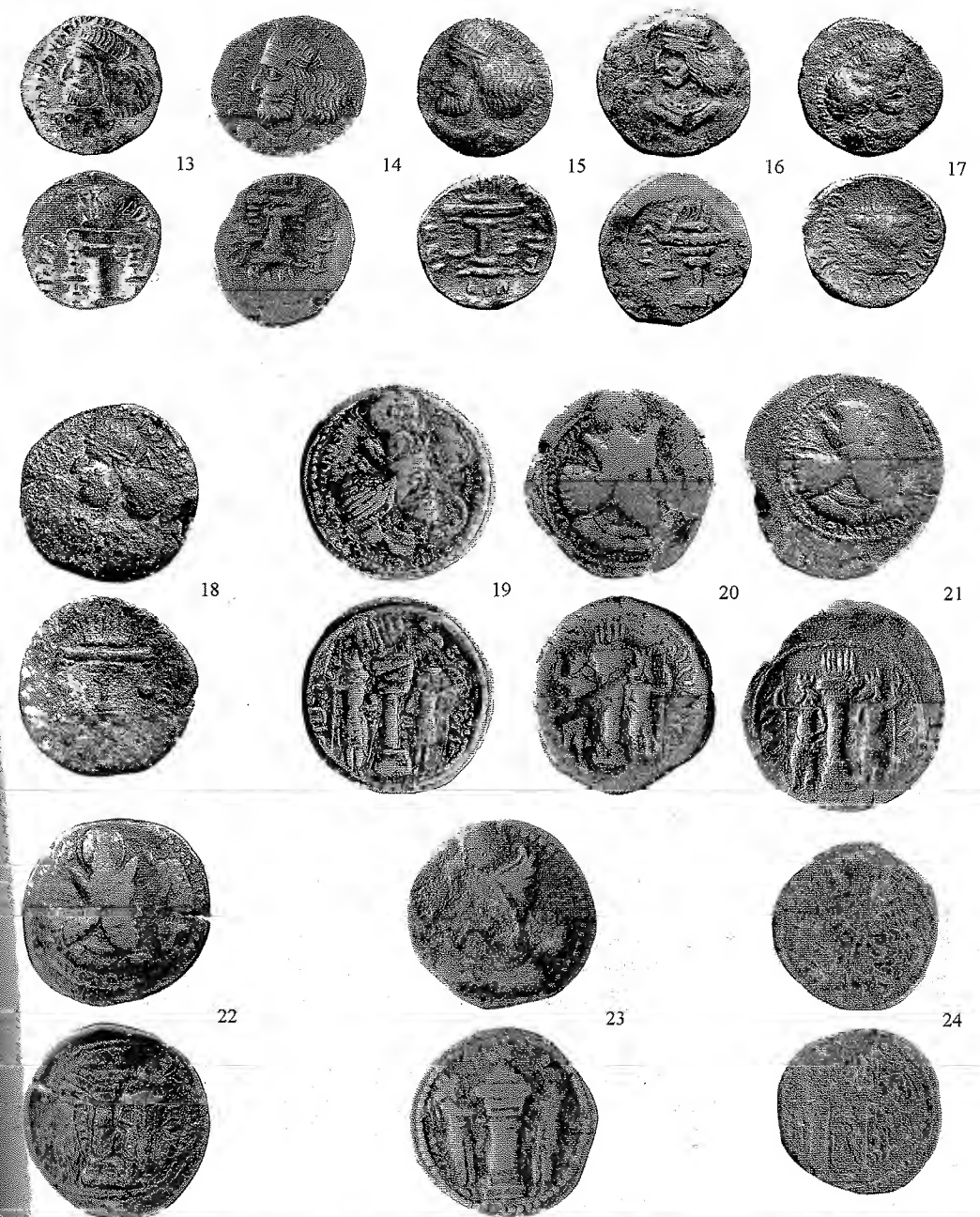
PHASE 2, Ardashir's first minting phase as 'king of kings' can be divided into three periods:

PERIOD I begins with a small bronze issue, which, while still using the old frontal portrait of Ardashir from Phase 1 on the obverse, already shows the new fire altar on the reverse (Alram & Gyselen 2003, type I/2, nos 5–7).

PERIOD II already shows Ardashir as the new king of the Iranians. The fire altar on the reverse also now includes the new explanatory circumscription 'Fire of Ardashir'. It is remarkable that Sasanian gold coinage began with this type, which is as yet known only from a single dinar coin (Fig. 2). It is tempting to assume that this was a festive issue to mark the lighting of the royal fire for Ardashir. On this first gold issue Ardashir bears only the title of 'king of the Iranians', and the fire altar on the reverse is not yet decorated with the diadem of the great king.

PERIOD III of phase 2 changes this: the titulature is now enlarged to 'king of kings of the Iranians' and the fire altar is enwreathed by a diadem band (Figs 3 and 4).

Based on typological details on the obverse, such as the pectoral star on Ardashir's head (B), the ribbed diadem bands (C) as well as the varied spelling of the obverse legend (ry'n / 'yr'n) (according to Skærvø in Alram & Gyselen 2003, 46), the bulk of





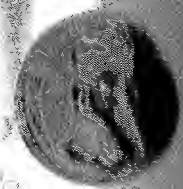
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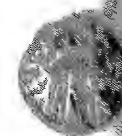
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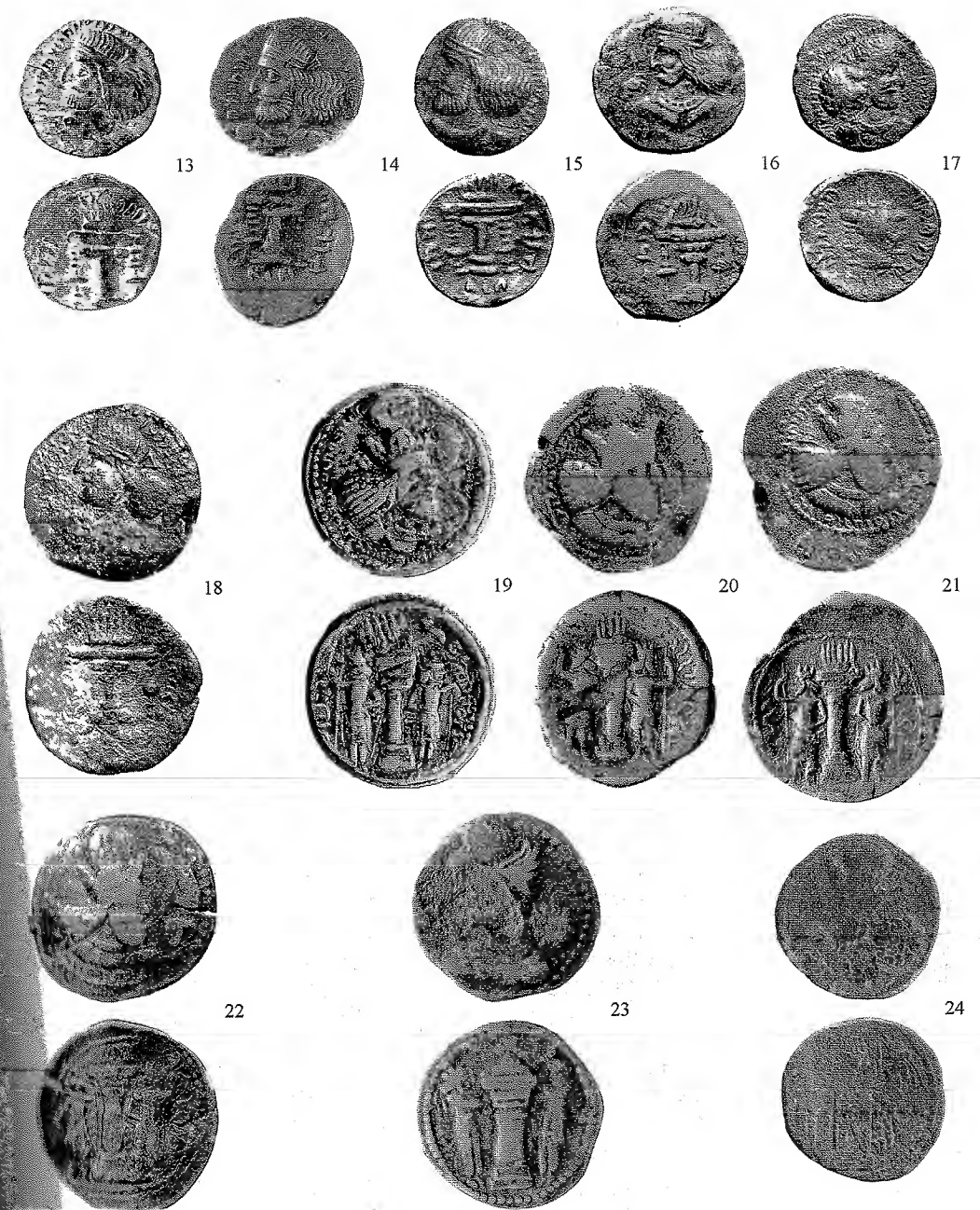


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Type II(3)/3a(2) coins may be divided into two groups (B and C) that apparently reflect two different mints.

Group/Mint B (Fig. 3), which is in any case older than Group/Mint C (Fig. 4), I have associated with the Median capital of Ecbatana/Hamadan, which had been the main mint for the drachm production of the Parthian Empire.

The crucial point in establishing the location of Group/Mint C is provided by the billon (base silver) tetradrachms (Fig. 5), which are clearly a Parthian legacy and which the Arsacids as a rule only minted in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. As I will explain later, the capture of Ctesiphon presumably occurred in 226/227. It is likely that Ardashir also took over the mint in the same year, issuing mostly tetradrachms and small bronze coins in the Parthian tradition.

PHASE 3, the final phase of Ardashir's minting, is marked by the introduction of a new coin type on the obverse showing Ardashir with a covered, artificial hairstyle (Figs 6 and 7). Also new is the legend to which *kē čīhr az yazdān* ('whose family/seed [is] from the gods') has been added (the primary meaning of *čīhr* is 'visible form, visible manifestation', according to Panaino 2004, 599).

The typological criteria permit the conclusion that the bipartition of minting as noted in Phase 2 continued and thus two mints were in operation. However, beginning

with Phase 3, the focus of minting now shifts from Group/Mint B ('Hamadan') to Group/Mint C ('Ctesiphon'), a development that corresponds precisely with the course of political events.

In both groups/mints there are two special issues each that depict Ardashir with special crowns and which are perhaps related to certain religious (?) ceremonies (Alram & Gyselen 2003, types IV/3a, V/3a (group/mint C) and types VI/3b and VII/3b (group/mint B)).

In Phase 3 it is probable that the mint in Merv (Group/Mint D) was finally established. Evidence is provided by an edition of small bronze coins ($\text{AE}/2$) of Type IIIa/3a, whose characteristic, somewhat coarser style distinguishes them from the contemporary issues of the two main mints and which were probably produced as small change for local needs (Fig. 8). The location of Merv is based in this case solely on the evidence of finds (Loginov & Nikitin 1993).

Also part of Phase 3 are the so-called 'throne-successor coins' (Type VIII/3a). Drachms and large copper coins ($\text{AE}/1$) of this type were issued (Figs 9–12). The main focus of production is clearly the copper coins, of which there are three different series. Most of these issues were probably produced in the second half of the third minting phase. The attribution of the 'throne-successor coins' to one of the two Groups/Mints C and B remains open, although it cannot be ruled out that an additional mint may also have been involved, perhaps located in the area of Sakastan, as we shall see below.

The very end of Phase 3 can at present only be seen in Group/Mint C ('Ctesiphon'). The decisive typological and stylistic criterion for the classification of these latest issues is provided primarily by the altar flames, which are delineated in small strokes, one above the other. These 'broken' flames are the only clearly definable element also found on the early coins of Shapur I and thus form the only typological bridge between Ardashir's and Shapur's coinage (Alram & Gyselen 2003, Ardashir I, phase 4: nos 46–58; Shapur I, style A: nos A2, A6, A11, 9–13).

Our main source for placing the coins in a chronological framework of absolute dates is the famous inscription of Bishapur (ŠVŠ) (cf. Back 1978, 378–83). This inscription is dated to the year 58 of an unnamed era; it is equated with Year 40 of the Ardashir Fire and Year 24 of the Shapur Fire. The calculation made by Altheim-Stiehl (1978) assumes that the Ardashir Fire was lit in the year 223/224. This is the very date that Fihri named as the year in which Ardashir killed the Arsacid great king Artabanus IV in the battle of Hormizdagan and proclaimed himself 'king of kings' of Iran (Nöldeke 1879, 14). Moreover, this date is transmitted by the Chronicle of Arbela, which records that the reign of the Parthians ended in the year 535 of the Seleucid era (223/224) (Sachau 1915, 16; Kawerau 1985). Additional confirmation is provided by the Acts of Syrian Martyrs (Assemanus, I, 15), which says that widespread persecution of the Christians began in the 31st year of the reign of Shapur II (=340/341), which is equated with the 117th year of the empire (=223/224).

Figures: 1. Ardashir I, drachm (3,77 g), type I/1 (group/mint A, Stakhr). SNS I, 1. 2. Ardashir I, drachm (4,03 g), type IIa/2 (group/mint B, 'Hamadan'). SNS I, A2. 3. Ardashir I, drachm (4,17 g), type IIe/3a (group/mint C, 'Ctesiphon'). SNS I, 23. 4. Ardashir I, tetradrachm (13,70 g), type IIe/3a (group/mint C, 'Ctesiphon'). SNS I, 31. 5. Ardashir I, drachm (4,16 g), type IIIa/3a (group/mint C, 'Ctesiphon'). SNS I, 125. 6. Ardashir I, drachm (4,27 g), type IIIb/3b (group/mint B, 'Hamadan'). SNS I, 125. 7. Ardashir I, drachm (4,27 g), type IIIb/3b (group/mint B, 'Hamadan'). SNS I, 125. 8. Ardashir I, $\text{AE}/2$ (3,17 g), type IIIa/3a (Merv). SNS I, 259. 9. Ardashir I, drachm (3,60 g), type VIII/3a (Sakastan?). SNS I, A54. 10. Ardashir I, drachm (4,07 g), type VIII/3a (Sakastan?). SNS I, A56. 11. Ardashir I, $\text{AE}/1$ (?), type VIII/3a (Sakastan?). SNS I, A56. 12. Ardashir I, $\text{AE}/1$ (11,85 g), type VIII/3a (Sakastan?). SNS I, 239 (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 3). 13. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (5,95 g), Sakastan. Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 9). 14. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (7,33 g), Sakastan. Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 10). 15. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (6,94 g), Sakastan. SNS I, pl. 39, E19 (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 11). 16. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (?), Sakastan. American Numismatic Society, New York. 17. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (5,40 g), Sakastan. SNS I, pl. 39, E20. 18. Farn-Sasan, copper tetradrachm (11,04 g), Sakastan. SNS I, pl. 39, E18 (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 11). 19. Shapur I, $\text{AE}/1$ (11 g), type IIa1/1a (style Abis; overstruck on Ardashir I, type VIII/3a). SNS I, A7. 20. Shapur I, $\text{AE}/1$ (13,89 g), type IIa1/1a (style Abis; overstrike). Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 12). 21. Shapur I, $\text{AE}/1$ (10,52 g), type IIa1/1a (style Abis; overstrike). Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 16). 22. Shapur I, $\text{AE}/1$ (12,16 g), type IIa1/1a (style Abis; overstrike). SNS I, A7 (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 17). 23. Hormizd II, $\text{AE}/1$ (9,29 g), Sakastan. Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 18). 24. Shapur II, $\text{AE}/1$ (6,41 g), type III/1b (Sakastan; cf. SNS III, A15). Münzkabinett, Wien (analysis cf. Table 1, no. 18).

by Altheim-Stiehl as Year 1 of the reign of Ardashir and inserted in by the Bishapur inscription. This would then mean that the 239/240, that the beginning of the unnamed era would fall in the the monument for Shapur I in Bishapur was erected in 262/263. minting phase thus begins with his coronation as king of Fars in his victory over Artabanus IV at the Battle of Hormizdagan in controversial, however, as to just when Ardashir's coronation as place—and thus when minting began in Fars (Phase 1). A reliable provided in any case by the unnamed 'Sasanian Era' mentioned ption (ŠVŠ) and which (according to Altheim-Stiehl 1978) began The absolute terminus ante quem is the Battle of Hormizdagan, have taken place in 223/224.

Tabari's account, Ardashir proclaimed himself 'king of kings' immediately, while still on the field (Nöldeke 1879, 15, according to the opted the title only after the conquest of Ctesiphon, cf. Widengren the sequence of events that then followed is unclear. According to Tabari, advance from Media described a large arc through Adurbadagan agagan / Adiabene to Asuristan / Assyria (Iraq), where he conquered the Sasanian Empire, Ctesiphon, in 226/227. Then he returned to Fars in his great eastern campaign. This took him through Sakastan and as far as Merv. However, the account in the anonymous *Nihayat al-muwa'll-'Arab* is different, placing this eastern campaign immediately after the victory over Artabanus and the conquest of Media (cf. Widengren who also accepts the version in the *Nihayat* and thus dates the eastern campaign to the conquest of Ctesiphon; Harmatta 1965, 186 ff. thinks otherwise; the eastern campaign—in accordance with Tabari—as starting in 233 with Severus Alexander; cf. also Kettenhofen 1995, 165 ff.

It is necessary to return once again to the dates of Ardashir's seizure of power from ancient records. The literary sources provide two different datings of Ardashir's reign, which are perhaps related to two different phases of the reign of 223/224 given above (ŠVŠ; Tabari; Chronicle of Arbela, AD 224, which is presumably related to his decisive victory over Artabanus at Hormizdagan. On the other hand, Agathias (4, 24, 1 Keydell) and Eusebius (1, 91, 18 ff. Brooks) give year 538 of the Seleucid era (1 October 312 BC) as the year the empire was founded. As early as 1879, Nöldeke dated the date with the conquest of the imperial capital of Ctesiphon (cf. Harmatta 1965, especially 411), a hypothesis that has been widely accepted by scholars and than which I have no better solution to offer.

When we consider the numismatic evidence as outlined here corroborated by the Bishapur inscription, Ardashir's second minting phase, his first as 'king of kings', started in

At a later stage, probably in 226/227, Group/Mint C is added, which can be definitely identified with Ctesiphon and which according to the typological evidence clearly started later than the coinage in Group/Mint B.

From the strategic point of view it seems to me very unlikely that Ardashir started his eastern campaign before the conquest of Ctesiphon. Ctesiphon was the centre of power in the western part of the Arsacid Empire and therefore it must have been Ardashir's primary aim to gain control of Mesopotamia as quickly as possible. That this took nearly three years is a sign that Arsacid resistance remained very strong even after the conquest of Media and the death of Artabanus IV. I thus prefer to follow the course of events as outlined by Tabari.

By contrast, Widengren (1971) accepts the version in the *Nihayat* and thus dates Ardashir's eastern campaign to before the conquest of Ctesiphon. I have only one numismatic argument against the version in the *Nihayat*; however, this does not prove that the account in the *Nihayat* is wrong, but can rather be taken as an indication that Tabari is right: this is the bronze coinage from the mint at Merv (Fig. 8), which starts only in Ardashir's third minting phase, thus in any case after, and not before, the conquest of Ctesiphon. If a causal relationship is assumed between the beginning of the coinage in Merv and Ardashir's eastern campaign, the numismatic evidence could indicate—as reported by Tabari—that the eastern campaign took place after the conquest of Ctesiphon.

The third and final period of Ardashir's rule, which may be roughly dated from c. AD 229/230 to c. 240 is marked primarily by conflict with Iran's traditional enemy, Rome, which started around 230. Evidently Ardashir felt he was now powerful enough to extend Sasanian expansion to the west as well. The first attack took place, as mentioned above, around 230: Nisibis was besieged, and Sasanian troops penetrated as far as Syria and Cappadocia (Felix 1985, 32 ff., discusses the sources; Winter & Dignas 2001, 87 ff. gives a summary of the events and additional references). The Roman emperor Severus Alexander launched a counter-offensive in the spring of 232. The fighting probably ended without a clear victory, with both sides suffering considerable losses.

Following Severus Alexander's withdrawal, there were three to four years of peace on the western front (Herodian 6, 6, 6) before a new advance into northern Mesopotamia took place in 235/236, in the course of which Nisibis and Carrhae were captured by the Sasanians.

As Harmatta and Kettenhofen have suggested, the eastern campaign of Ardashir might have taken place within this time span, probably starting in 233 (cf. Harmatta 1965, 186 ff. and Kettenhofen 1995, 165 ff.). According to Tabari, Ardashir started his campaign from Fars. He first marched eastwards to Sakastan and then to the north through Abarshahr at least as far as Merv, which was to hold a key strategic position in the north-east of the Sasanian empire (Kettenhofen 1995, 171, n. 74). According to

(ŠKZ), Ardashir installed a king in Sakastan who was also named Ardashir and was probably a member of the royal family (Huyse 1999, 54, ŠKZ §41). In Merv a sub-king named Ardashir was also enthroned (at the beginning of his career Ardashir had already installed his brother Ardashir as king of Kerman). Ardashir also succeeded in conquering al-Bahrain. It is not possible, however, to determine exactly when the Arabian campaign took place, and we are more or less forced to speculate. According to Tabari the conquest of al-Bahrain followed the eastern campaign, which in turn followed the conquest of Ctesiphon; by contrast, the Nihayat places the Arabian campaign after the conquest of Ctesiphon (Widengren 1971, 752 ff.; Schippmann 1990, 17 ff., n. 33 with additional literature). Kettenhofen (TAVO, B V 11) dates the Arabian campaign to around 235, Harmatta (1965, 193) around 237/238.

The history of Sakastan in the late Parthian and early Sasanian period is somewhat unclear. From the numismatic sources we know that a certain Farn-Sasan (Figs 13–18) ruled in this region, who might be regarded as contemporary with Ardashir I. On the obverse of his copper tetradrachms the bust of the king facing left is depicted in the style of the coin portraits of the Indo-Parthian kings. On well-preserved specimens we can see the left arm of the king holding an arrow in his hand (Fig. 16). As far as I know, this type has no parallel in the Indo-Parthian coinage but is, however, well known from the coins of the Kushan king Soter Megas. On the reverse we see the Sasanian fire altar clearly copied from coins of Ardashir I.

The legend is written in Parthian Middle Persian and was read correctly for the first time by Nikitin. Unusually, it starts on the reverse at 10 o'clock to the left of the fire altar 'Farn-Sasan, son of Adur-Sasan' (prnssn—BRY `twrssn) and continues on the obverse at 11 o'clock 'grandson of Tiridat, great-grandson of Sanabar, King of Kings' (BRY BRY tyrdty BRY npy s'nbry MLKYN MLKA) (Nikitin 1994a and b).

The arrow in the hand of the king as well as the title 'king of kings' indicate that Farn-Sasan regarded himself not as vassal or friend of Ardashir but as his enemy despite having chosen the Sasanian fire altar for the reverse of his coins.

The only person mentioned in the coin inscription of Farn-Sasan whom we know is his great-grandfather Sanabares, who ruled the Indo-Parthian kingdom in the first half of the second century AD. He struck silver drachms in Sakastan and the so-called Nike-tetradrachms in Arachosia (Alram 1986, nos 1191–6; Senior 2001, nos 261–4).

The successors of Sanabares were Abdagases II and Pakores (Alram 1986, nos 1142; 1189–90 and Senior 2001, nos 233–5, 268–9). Both kings issued silver drachms and copper tetradrachms as well. After Pakores, however, the silver drachms disappeared and only the copper tetradrachms continued to be issued, but in an increasingly barbarized style with totally blundered legends (Alram 1986, nos 1214–6 and Senior 2001, nos 271–4). These coins seem to be the immediate forerunners of Farn-Sasan's tetradrachms. On some of these coins the king already holds an arrow (Senior 2001, nos 272.3T); the same motif is also seen on a unique gold coin attributed to Abdagases II

however, the authenticity of this coin seems to me highly questionable (Grenet & Bopearachchi 1996 and 1999; Senior 2001, 2, 190).

Farn-Sasan eventually reorganized the coinage of his predecessors in the Sakastan area. A new coin type was introduced showing an interesting mixture of old Indo-Parthian and new Sasanian elements. For the coin inscriptions Farn-Sasan used the Parthian script, which is also found on the silver drachms of his great-grandfather Sanabares from Sakastan.

As Nikitin (1994a) has shown, the coinage of Farn-Sasan can be divided into two main series. The first is struck on smaller flans (18–20 mm), with elaborately engraved images and legends and a mean weight of 7–8g (Figs 13–16). On some rare coins of this group the king's portrait faces right (Fig. 17). The second series has larger flans (25 mm), often with blundered inscriptions, and a mean weight of c. 11g (Fig. 18). It should be noted, however, that the inscription on this second series, although blundered, might not be identical to that of the first series.

Around 233 Indo-Parthian rule in Sakastan came to an end, and the region became an integral part of the Sasanian empire, placed under direct control of a king named Ardashir who was probably a member of the royal family or a close confidant of the 'king of kings'. As mentioned above, another subking named Ardashir was put in charge in Merv, and a third king who was definitely a brother of Ardashir I, as reported by Tabari, and whose name was also Ardashir ruled over Kerman province (as attested in the Shapur I's Ka'ba-i Zardusht inscription §41, Huyse 1999, 54).

These kings or provincial governors did not normally have the right to mint coins. This was the exclusive prerogative of the 'king of kings', and an important part of Ardashir's monetary reform in contrast to conditions in former Parthian times. There is only one exception to this rule—apart from the Kushano-Sasanian coin series—when the king of Merv issued small bronze coins under Shapur I bearing the inscription mlwy MLKA, which might be seen in the context of a long tradition of local bronze coinage in that area (Loginov & Nikitin 1993, nos 123 ff.).

Now we should return to the so-called 'throne-successor coins' (Figs 9–12) of Ardashir I, which—as I have attempted to show—were in any case minted in Ardashir's third minting phase and should therefore be dated roughly to between 229/230 and 239/240. Due to their typological and stylistic peculiarities, it is not possible to determine whether they were struck in one of the two main mints or at another mint which we are not able to localize at present.

Since Paruck (1924) the two busts on the obverse have been identified as Ardashir and his son and crown prince Shapur. Paruck also proposed a reading of the obverse legend which runs as follows, starting at 3 o'clock: 'Shahpuhri malka Airan minochitri'. With some variations and additions this reading was taken over by Göbl (1954), Lukonin (1968), Ghirshman (1975) and finally Mosig-Walburg (1980 and 1990). In 1983, however, Göbl stated that the reading of the inscription is doubtful ('Jedenfalls

ist die Legende mit den derzeit zur Verfügung stehenden Materialien nicht lesbar. . .'), although he was still certain that it was Shapur as crown prince who was depicted.

While preparing my *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* (Alram 1986), nearly 20 years ago, I myself tried and failed to read this legend. Finally, during our work on the first volume of the *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum* I tried once again, only to fail yet again. Even Skjærvø, who prepared the palaeographical part of our publication, was unable to read it (Alram & Gyselen 2003, 55–6, Skjærvø thought the name of 'Ardashir' could perhaps be read on two specimens), as also were Carlo Cereti (Rome) and Dieter Weber (Göttingen). Naturally this does not mean that somebody might not be able to decipher it in the future. On the other hand we should be careful to guard against constructing things which definitely do not exist. We must be aware of the fact that Sasanian coins sometimes bear totally blundered legends, as can be seen, for example, on the famous gold dinar of Shapur I from the mint of Merv (Alram & Gyselen 2003, pl. 35, A51), and even in the reverse legends of the 'throne-successor coins' themselves Ardashir's name appears in a corrupt form on most of the coins.

Besides the epigraphical problem, the question remains as to why Shapur should be depicted as a beardless young man in the 230s, only five or six years before he himself became the 'king of kings'. In 223/224 he had already fought at his father's side in the battle of Hormizdagan, as recorded in literary sources as well as on the famous rock relief at Firuzabad, where he is depicted as a bearded man (cf. von Gall 1990, fig. 3, pl. 6). Shapur is also shown as a bearded man on the second relief of Firuzabad and in Naqsh-e Rostam. According to the numismatic evidence all these reliefs should be dated to the same period as the 'throne-successor coins', that is to say to the last ten years of Ardashir's reign, between 230 and 240.

A very prominent person in Ardashir's reliefs is the beardless young man who normally stands behind the 'king of kings' holding a fan over Ardashir's head, as in the investiture reliefs of Firuzabad, Naqsh-e Rostam and Naqsh-e Rostam. In the battle scene of Firuzabad he is depicted on horseback fighting together with Ardashir and Shapur against the Parthians. His characteristic insignia is a high tiara without a diadem band, decorated with a special *nišan*. Hinz (1969) has identified this person as 'Ardashir's Knappe und Wedelträger' which does not add significantly to our knowledge. In any case the tiara is rather similar to the headdress of the beardless young man on the 'throne-successor coins', here, however, the tiara is decorated with a diadem band. Göbl (1983, n. 11) believed he could detect a *nišan* on the diadem of the 'prince', but I was unable to identify any trace of it on the coin in question (Fig. 10) when I had the opportunity to examine it directly. Moreover, a beardless young man or boy is found on the relief of Naqsh-e Rostam together with a naked deity holding a club, identified by Walter Hinz (1969) as Verethragna and Bahram, the eldest son of Shapur, who became 'king of kings' in 273. Finally, the type of a beardless young man is depicted on some issues of Bahram II; here too he is usually identified as the crown prince (Göbl 1974, type II/1; pl. 4, no. 54).

I am unable to provide a solution to this problem here. My aim has been merely to show that the identification of the 'crown prince' Shapur, on Ardashir's so-called 'throne-successor coins', is not as certain as is always stated in numismatic literature. In my view there are rather strong similarities between the beardless young man on the 'throne-successor coins' and the beardless man on Ardashir's reliefs, whose identity, however, is somewhat unclear. I would like to point out that the famous high priest Kartir is also always depicted as beardless; he too is wearing a similar tiara to that of the beardless young man on Ardashir's reliefs, decorated with a special *nišan*, but also with a diadem band like the tiara of the young man on the 'throne-successor' coins. Therefore the young man on Ardashir's reliefs as well as the person on the 'throne-successor' coins may be regarded as a kind of priest (I am grateful to Shahrokh Razmjou of Tehran for making this helpful suggestion).

The epigraphic and literary sources indicate that Shapur received the diadem of the great king during the lifetime of his father in 240. This probably took place between April and September, because according to the Bishapur inscription (ŠVŠ): the lighting of the Shapur fire is dated to 239/240 and according to the Mani Codex in Cologne, CMC 18, 1–10, it is stated that, when Mani was 24 years old, (i.e. year 551 of the Seleucid Era = 12 April 240–1 April 241), Ardashir conquered Hatra and Shapur received the diadem (Koenen & Römer 1988, 10; cf. Sundermann 1990, 295 and Huyse 1999, 2, 7; Alram & Gyselen 2003, 149–52 also gives a full discussion of this in a numismatic context).

In this connection it has been repeatedly suggested that Ardashir and Shapur ruled jointly (Chaumont 1974, for example, but later rejected Chaumont 1979; cf. also Mosig-Walburg 1980 and 1990, as well as Kettenhofen 1982 and Sundermann 1990). In numismatic terms, the theory of a co-regency was created by linking the literary sources to the so-called 'throne-successor coins', the problematic nature of which I have already pointed out here. In my opinion, they may be ruled out as proof of a joint reign by father and son. Shapur's coinage shows that he succeeded his father as *šāhān šāh Erān kē čīhr az yazdān* without limitation.

As Lukonin has pointed out, many of the copper issues of Ardashir's throne-successor type were overstruck by Shapur I (Figs 19–22) (Alram & Gyselen 2003, nos 1–A8; cf. Lukonin 1968, 108). Here we may ask why Shapur overstruck precisely those coins which were intended to bear his own image? Other overstrikes are known from the mint of Merv, where many early bronze coins of Shapur I were struck over Ardashir's issue of Merv mintage (coins of the local king were also struck over issues of Ardashir I). Loginov and Nikitin have surmised that a large series of Ardashir's coppers had been stored at the mint and was used as a ready stock of flans for striking new coins on the accession of Shapur I (Loginov & Nikitin 1993, 229).

In the case of the 'throne-successor coins', however, an explanation on these lines does not seem to add up. Metal analysis has shown that in their chemical composition the 'throne-successor coins' are quite different from all of Ardashir's other bronze coins, and because they are completely lacking in tin they can be described as 'pure

copper coins'. A first set of analyses was carried out for SNS I (cf. the contributions by R. Linke, M. Schreiner and J.-N. Barrandon in Alram & Gyselen 2003, 70–90), and a second was executed by J. Riederer (Rathgen-Forschungslabor, Berlin) in spring 2004 using Atomic Absorption Spectrometry (Table 1). Riederer's investigations (for which I am extremely grateful) corroborate the results published in SNS I fully: The most characteristic component in Ardashir's normal bronze coins is a relatively high percentage of lead ranging around the 20% mark, and this is also the case with the following issues of his successor Shapur I where the lead content is sometimes over 30% (cf. Alram & Gyselen 2003, 80–1 (Linke and Schreiner) and 89, fig. 1 (Barrandon)). The lead content of the 'throne-successor coins', however, normally lies below 1% (Table 1, nos 1–8) as well as of those copper coins of Shapur I, which all seem to be overstrikes, some of them clearly struck on Ardashir's 'throne-successor type' as already stated (Table 1, nos 13–17). A further criterion is the weight of the copper 'throne-successor coins': with a mean weight of 11.50 g (Shapur I's overstrikes have approximately the same weight) they are much lighter than all the other bronze issues of Ardashir I, which I have attributed to 'Ctesiphon' and 'Hamadan' and which weigh around 17 g (cf. Alram & Gyselen 2003, 163 ff., tables 9–13).

Finally, metal analysis of four coins of Farn-Sasan (Table 1, nos 9–12) has shown that their chemical composition is quite similar to those of the 'throne-successor coins': they also consist of nearly pure copper and a very low percentage of lead. The lighter weight of the 'throne-successor coins' also corresponds closely to the weight of Farn-Sasan's second series with larger flans, which as mentioned above has a mean weight of c. 11 g.

To sum up, the differences in chemical composition between Ardashir's bronze coins and his 'throne-successor coins' might be the result of a different production process, and can therefore be taken as an indication that these issues were produced not at Ardashir's two main mints ('Ctesiphon' and 'Hamadan'), but at another mint which can probably be localized in the Sakastan area, where the coins of Farn-Sasan were also produced.

A further argument should be noted. It was Skjærvø who first realized that the inscriptions of the 'throne-successor coins' contain a strange mixture of Sasanian and Parthian-type letters which in some parts display close similarities to the coin inscriptions of Farn-Sasan, the last Indo-Parthian king of Sakastan (Skjærvø in Alram & Gyselen 2003, 55–6). Lukonin (1969, 40) was the first to assign these coins to Salsan, even though his reading led him to wrongly attribute them to Ardashir, the King of Sakastan mentioned in the Shapur I's Ka'ba-I Zardusht inscription (ŠKZ).

The basis of investigation is of course far too narrow to supply any definite answer, but it does provide initial indications that Ardashir's 'throne-successor coins' probably originated from the Sakastan area. If this is true, then the young prince on the obverse who displays such strong similarities to the beardless young man on Ardashir's coin might probably be identified as Ardashir, the king of Sakastan, who was put in charge of

Table 1. Chemical composition of copper coins of Ardashir I, Farn-Sasan, Shapur I and Hormizd II probably struck in Sakastan.

	SNS, Type	Denomination	Weight	SNS, No.	Cu	Sn	Pb	Zn	Fe	Ni	Ag	Sb	As	Bi	Co	Au	Cd
1.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	11,58 g	235	99,98	<0,25	<0,04	0,006	0,01	<0,01	0,008	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
2.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	11,03 g	236	99,56	<0,25	<0,04	0,013	0,42	<0,01	0,006	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
3.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	11,85 g	239	98,91	<0,25	0,87	0,010	0,16	0,016	0,036	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
4.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	9,46 g	241	99,94	<0,25	<0,04	0,008	0,05	<0,01	0,006	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
5.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	11,27 g	244	98,60	<0,25	1,22	0,010	0,14	0,013	0,015	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
6.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	?	private	97,80	<0,25	1,85	0,008	0,25	0,040	0,049	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
7.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	?	private	98,98	<0,25	0,86	0,009	0,11	0,014	0,026	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
8.	Ardashir I	VIII/3a	10,54 g	238	99,80	0,0009	0,022	---	---	---	0,04	0,0005	0,024	---	---	0,0006	---
9.	Farn-Sasan	4Δ (Æ)	5,95 g	MK Wien	99,35	<0,25	0,27	0,007	0,30	0,019	0,036	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	0,016	<0,02	<0,002
10.	Farn-Sasan	4Δ (Æ)	7,33 g	MK Wien	98,29	<0,25	1,32	0,006	0,35	0,017	0,022	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
11.	Farn-Sasan	4Δ (Æ)	11,04 g	E 18	99,98	<0,0001	0,0015	---	---	---	0,005	0,0015	0,0085	---	---	<0,00003	---
12.	Farn-Sasan	4Δ (Æ)	6,94 g	E 19	98,18	0,029	0,57	---	---	---	0,01	0,0014	0,019	---	---	0,0002	---
13.	Shapur I	Ila 1/1a	10,52 g	6	99,10	<0,25	0,79	0,008	0,08	0,012	0,015	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
14.	Shapur I	Ila 1/1a	10,47 g	7	99,98	<0,25	<0,04	0,008	0,01	<0,01	0,005	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
15.	Shapur I	Ila 1/1a	13,89 g	MK Wien	98,29	<0,25	1,53	0,009	0,12	0,015	0,032	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
16.	Shapur I	Ila 1/1a	10,52 g	MK Wien	99,26	<0,25	0,58	0,008	0,13	0,014	0,013	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002
17.	Shapur I	Ila 1/1a	12,16 g	5	98,60	0,094	1,23	---	---	---	0,06	0,0019	0,02	---	---	0,0002	---
18.	Hormizd II	---	9,33 g	MK Wien	99,97	<0,25	<0,04	0,006	0,02	<0,01	0,007	<0,05	<0,10	<0,025	<0,01	<0,02	<0,002

These analyses were executed by J. Riederer (Rathgen-Forschungslabor, Berlin) using Atomic Absorption Spectrometry. I am extremely grateful to him for this prompt assistance. Nos 8, 11, 12 and 17 have already been analysed by J.-N. Barrandon, cf. Alram & Gyselen 2004, 89.

Ardashir the 'king of kings' after he had removed Farn-Sasan from Sakastan, probably in the 230s.

From the area of Sakastan and Arachosia there are also a number of stray finds of Farn-Sasan's tetradrachms, Ardashir's throne-successor coppers and large copper coins of Shapur I which might have circulated together in that area—reported by Rapson (1904), and by MacDowall & Ibrahim (1978) from the Kandahar Museum. Moreover, Mitchiner (1969) published part of a small hoard containing copper tetradrachms of the last Indo-Parthian kings, Pakores and Farn-Sasan, as well as large coppers of Shapur I probably overstruck on Ardashir's 'throne-successor type'. However, these finds are far too scarce to be used as firm evidence for localizing the mint of these issues in Sakastan.

Together with Merv, Sakastan became an important strategic point on the eastern borderlands of the Sasanian empire. This is underlined by the fact that in both provinces mints were established in earliest Sasanian times which issued imperial gold and silver coins. From Merv signed dinars and unsigned silver drachms are known from as early as the reign of Shapur I (Alram & Gyselen 2003, pl. 21, A9, A10 and pl. 35, A51; Loginov & Nikitin 1999, nos 26 and 27). The earliest signed drachms from Sakastan are those of Shapur's son, Bahram I (273–276) (Nikitin 1999, fig. 1). The mint of Sakastan continued to issue coins up to Shapur II (309–379) (cf. Schindel 2004, nos 90–6). It is interesting to note that the tradition of minting large copper coins was also retained, for example by Hormizd II (303–309) (Göbl 1971, pl. 5, nos 86 and 87), whose portrait faces left, a phenomenon which should be regarded as a special characteristic of the Sakastan mint and not as an error made by the die engraver (Figs 23 and 24) (cf. Schindel 2004, 1, 74; one of these coins was also analysed, Table 1, no. 18, and shows a similar composition to all the other copper coins originating in Sakastan).

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 NPIIN Alram 1986.
 SNS *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum*.
 SNS I Alram & Gyselen 2003.
 SNS III Schindel 2004.
 TAVO *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients*.

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The Sasanian relief at Rag-i Bibi (Northern Afghanistan)

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I. The circumstances of discovery

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AFGHANISTAN REMAINS AT THE FRONTIER OF CENTRAL ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY, a country which still throws up remarkable discoveries, forcing scholars to rethink prevailing historical presumptions. Despite twenty-five years of civil war, discoveries such as the Bactrian inscriptions of Tang-i Safedak and Rabatak, as well as other Bactrian and early Buddhist manuscripts, continue to appear. Remarkably, most of these discoveries are not the result of systematic archaeological surveys but are usually casual finds by villagers.

The rock carving at Rag-i Bibi, northern Afghanistan, which is the subject of this paper, is a further example of such 'casual' finds (Pl. 6). Indeed, were it not for a series of coincidences the carving would still not be known to foreign scholars. My first intimation of the existence of this carving came in December 2002 when the British Museum held an Afghanistan day. At the time I had recently returned from an expedition to Yakaulang, Central Afghanistan, to recover the Bactrian inscription of Tang-i Safedak. The conveners of the conference kindly allowed me a ten minute 'slot' at the end of the morning's proceedings to report on the discovery. An Afghan journalist, Najibullah Razaq, who was in the audience, later approached me and showed me video footage of the site which he and a BBC correspondent had visited earlier in 2002. Mr Razaq later forwarded additional photographs which showed a horse with rider at the pallop and a number of standing or mounted attendants. From the attendants' clothing, it appeared that the carving was Kushan or Kushano-Sasanian.

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